

Henry “Box” Brown, Charles Stearns, and Classics as White Voice in the Freedom Narratives of Formerly Enslaved Black People in 19<sup>th</sup> Century America

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**I. Henry “Box” Brown (ca. 1815-1897)**

- a. Born at Hermitage Plantation of Virginia in captivity
- b. Enslaved for 34 years largely at a tobacco factory in Richmond, Virginia
- c. Self-emancipated by being shipped in a box to Philadelphia
- d. Published the second edition of his freedom narrative on his own in 1851

**II. Charles Stearns (1809-1867)**

- a. White male abolitionist
- b. Author of Brown’s first published freedom narrative (1849)
- c. Studied Classics as evident in the content of Brown’s narrative:
  - i. “...all whose eyes gaze upon the picture here drawn of misery, and of endurance, worthy of a Spartan, and such as a hero of olden times might be proud of...” (p. iv)
  - ii. “...arose therefrom a living man, a being made in God’s own image, a son of Jehovah, whom the piety and republicanism of this nation had doomed to pass through this terrible ordeal, before the wand of the goddess of liberty could complete his transformation from a slave to a freeman!” (p. viii)
  - iii. “It is a remnant of that spirit of barbarity, which formerly induced men to fight for conquest and territory, in the palmiest days of the ancient Eastern empires, when the fields of the earth, fair mother of our existence, were made fertile by the rich streams of blood, flowing from the mangled corpses strewn upon its surface, by the fiendish barbarity of a Sennacherib, a Cyrus, a Xerxes, and an Alexander ” (p. 72)
  - iv. But ah! the men who thee so loud did call,  
The souls, whom thou hadst saved from bondage dread,  
O fearful tale! Themselves on thee did tread;  
And thy fair robe was pierced with traitorous thrusts.  
As Caesar groaning fell and kissed the dust,  
When ingrate Brutus’ blows on him did fall. (p. 86)

### III. Charles Swain (1801-1874)

- a. White male English poet and engraver
- b. Wrote *Forget Not the Unhappy* (1849) which has a minor Classics reference
- c. Brown features his poem on the title page of the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of his narrative

Forget not the unhappy,  
Though sorrow may annoy,  
There's something then for memory,  
Hereafter to enjoy!  
Oh! still from Fortune's garland,  
Some flowers for others strew;  
And forget not the unhappy,  
For, ah! their friends are few.

### IV. Charles C. Green (dates unknown)

- a. White male abolitionist from Boston
- b. Wrote *The Nubian Slave* (1845), an antislavery romantic tragedy
- c. His lithographs influenced Brown's "Mirror of Slavery" panorama



"The Escape" Charles C. Green,  
*The Nubian Slave*, 1845

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